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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Letter dated 2 May 1997 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the statement on Belarus issued by the European Union on 29 April 1997.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 114 (b) of the preliminary list.

(Signed) N. H. BIEGMAN
Permanent Representative of the
Netherlands to the United Nations

* A/52/50.

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ANNEX

[Original: English and French]

Statement on Belarus issued by the European Union on 29 April 1997

At its meeting on 29 April 1997, the General Affairs Council took note of the letters of 10 April 1997 from President Lukashenko and Mr. Antonovich, responding to the report of the European Union fact-finding mission and the Council conclusions of 24 February 1997.

The European Union notes a clear discrepancy between the undertakings as expressed in the above-mentioned letters, and recent developments in Belarus. The European Union expresses its deep concern at the wave of arbitrary arrests of demonstrators and members of the opposition in recent weeks. Furthermore, the European Union rejects the various statements made by representatives of the Belarusian authorities since 10 April 1997 to the effect that the present political situation in Belarus should be accepted by the international community as a fait accompli.

The above-mentioned events raise doubts about the declared willingness of the Government of Belarus to work constructively with the European Union and relevant international organizations towards establishing a political system that respects the internationally accepted norms for human rights and political freedoms. Recalling its conclusions of 24 February 1997, the European Union reiterates its position that cooperation between States members and institutions of the European Union and Belarus cannot proceed in the absence of convincing efforts to establish such a system.

The European Union remains committed to a process whereby Belarus, in due course, can play a meaningful role on the European continent.

The European Union welcomes the formal undertaking by the Belarus authorities to initiate consultations with all the deputies of the elected thirteenth Supreme Soviet to establish a proper balance between the functions and duties of the members of the legislative, executive and judicial powers, as well as devise mechanisms that would strengthen respect for human rights and the position of the independent media.

The European Union appeals to the Belarusian authorities to implement this commitment by the end of May 1997.

The European Union, in close cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe is prepared to assist the Belarusian authorities in the process of democratization.

The European Union supports the OSCE efforts to establish independent mechanisms for monitoring the functioning of the existing legal framework for the protection of human rights and an independent role for the mass media and possible improvements to this legal framework.

The European Union supports the establishment of an OSCE mission in Belarus, which it believes could play a vital role in promoting democratic reforms and respect for human rights.

The European Union has taken note of the appointment of Mr. Kosto by the Presidency as its Special Representative to the Republic of Belarus and has noted that Mr. Kosto has been given the tasks of:

(a) Assisting both the Belarusian authorities and all the deputies of the elected thirteenth Supreme Soviet in setting up a formal consultation mechanism to discuss proposals for amending the 1994 Constitution with a view to establishing a proper balance in the system of the separation of powers;

(b) Monitoring and facilitating the consultations in coordination with OSCE and the Council of Europe;

(c) Reporting to the General Affairs Council on the progress made in those consultations.

To these ends, Mr. Kosto will be assisted by a team of experts and will periodically visit Belarus. Mr. Kosto's mandate will be reviewed as required by political developments in Belarus and by the scope of future OSCE involvement.

Mr. Kosto and the team of experts would expect to have unrestricted access to any person or organization in Belarus they may wish to see.